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ABSTRACT

Educational problems can only be dealt with by overcoming social inequalities in urban areas. To solve the educational problems, teachers and administrators must work to solve such urban problems as unemployment, inadequate housing, hunger and malnutrition, urban mortality, and crime. Only if they understand these problems will educators have the necessary background for them to be in positions to act as advocates and spokesmen for the less fortunate. By making social change a high priority the problems plaguing urban schools can be redressed. (MC)

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Educational Reform and the Plight of the Nation's Poor

A Political Approach for Educators

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Foreword

As we meet here in Atlanta this year, I would like us to think of Martin Luther King, Jr., who contributed so much to our progress toward equality.

As a small child, I used to travel with my father from Detroit to Memphis to attend the annual convention of the Church of God and Christ. My mother would have to pack big lunches for us to eat along the way because black people were not allowed to stop in restaurants. In those times, black people were afraid for their lives because they had seen the horrible treatment meted out to those who broke any of Jim Crow's rules.

Today, thanks to Martin Luther King, Jr., we no longer need to be afraid. Dr. King helped us overcome our fear of challenging racism and violence to bring about social reform. But even more, Dr. King's leadership was so valuable because he allowed white people to redeem themselves of the guilt they felt for the way they had treated us.

When Martin Luther King spoke of social reform, he always spoke about the importance of education in implementing reform. Today his wife, Mrs. Coretta Scott King, is perpetuating the King legacy with her leadership at the King Center for Social Change and with the example she is setting for people worldwide. It is up to all of us to follow the example of the King family in working for equality for everyone.

Robert L. Green, Dean
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Educational Reform and the Plight of the Nation's Poor

A Political Approach for Educators

ROBERT L. GREEN

In recent years, education experts have spent a great deal of energy trying to improve the quality of urban schooling. They have suggested that colleges of education develop curricula on minority or urban culture and that teachers be specially trained to work in cities. They have insisted that black, Chicano and native American viewpoints be represented in textbooks and educational materials. They have asserted that modern facilities—more adequate libraries, video equipment, and larger, less-crowded classrooms—would help clear up the stagnation of our urban education systems.

Although a great deal can be gained from adopting these suggestions, there is more to improving quality education in cities. The problems of urban schools are closely tied to the problems of the larger urban society. Even if we equipped urban schools with the latest in audiovisual equipment, the best texts and the best teachers, schools would still have to overcome severe barriers to learning. Educational problems in our cities reach far beyond the classroom. To solve these problems teachers and administrators

must become more than educators. They must become crusaders against urban ills such as unemployment, inadequate housing and crime.

Unemployment

At a recent Urban League Conference in San Francisco, California, Representative Yvonne Braithwaite Burke stated, "True dignity, true freedom are economic in 1974." That being the case, many minority and poor people in the densely populated areas of American cities are deprived of human dignity and the economic freedom which other Americans enjoy.

This year unemployment reached 12 percent in urban poverty areas, an increase over 1970 when urban unemployment was 10 percent. The situation is even worse in selected areas. For example, Detroit has been one of the hardest hit areas economically. The following are the unemployment figures for Detroit for an eight month period this year.[1]

February 1974	13.1 percent	June 1974	13.2 percent
March 1974	13.1 percent	July 1974	13.2 percent
April 1974	12.8 percent	August 1974	13.7 percent
May 1974	12.5 percent	September 1974	11.3 percent

Milton Taylor and Donald Peppard, Michigan State University economists, have been making frequent trips to Detroit to study the economic situation there. Mr. Peppard says that during the summer months when students enter the labor force, the unemployment figures for the inner city double those of the general metropolitan area. That means that last summer in the low-income, minority areas of Detroit, unemployment reached from 26.4 percent to 29.6 percent. Nearly one-third of the inner city work force was unemployed.

Besides high unemployment, blacks and other minorities face discrimination in employment. In 1973, District Court Judge Damon Keith ordered the Detroit Edison Company to pay back wages to black victims of "deliberate and insidious" racial discrimination.[2] Also in 1973, the American Telephone and Telegraph Company agreed to award fifteen million in back pay and an additional twenty-three million a year in raises to victims of the company's unfair labor practices.[3]

In October 1974, the U.S. Justice Department, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Department of Labor found Michigan Bell Telephone Company guilty of not meeting

hiring and promotion goals for women in 1973-74.[4] Bell was also guilty of making inadequate efforts to recruit women and minority men.

Inadequate Housing

Shabby, over-priced housing is frequently a consequence of unemployment and poverty in the central city. In the U.S., one-third of the nation's poor live in substandard housing.[5] The Department of Health, Education & Welfare estimates that in 1972, 25 million households (40 percent of the population) were eligible for housing subsidies.[6]

Often shoddy housing is rented or sold to poor people for exorbitant prices. Federal officials and businessmen have been indicted in New York, Detroit, Philadelphia and other cities for housing scandals.[7] In Detroit, there was a $250 million scandal involving HUD programs. A real estate company official made more than one million dollars by bribing Federal Housing Administration appraisers, but his fine was only $20,000. The most common sentences in this scandal were probation and reduced jail terms.[8]

Hunger–Who Shall Eat?

Another consequence of unemployment and poverty is hunger. In the past two years famine has left half of the world in perpetual hunger. More than a quarter million people have starved in India and Africa.[9] In Ethiopia more than one million of the population of twenty-four million are near starvation.[10] Last June a U.N. report estimated that 800 million people, almost one quarter of the world's population, may be suffering from malnutrition.[11]

World population, approaching four billion today, is expected to reach ten to sixteen billion by 2100. This means that world grain production must increase three percent each year to feed the population increase.[12]

The world hunger problem is somewhat the result of natural disasters such as flooding and drought. Some of the world climate conditions depleting food reserves and increasing starvation include:[13]

1. Six years of drought in sub-Sahara Africa.
2. Year after year of good growing in the U.S. Midwest broken by several rainless months this summer.
3. One-half of Bangladesh flooded while neighboring India suffers famine due to lack of rainfall.

Unfortunately, however, the selfishness of the rich is also a factor contributing to hunger. Recent times have found wealthy nations buying up what food there is, leaving nothing for poor countries:[14]

1. Ethiopia, Nicaragua and Central Java consume only one-third the amount of protein Americans do.
2. Americans use five times the amount of grain that developing nations use.
3. Russia uses four times the amount of grain developing nations use and Europe three times that amount.
4. Livestock of the U.S. eat two or three times better than the starving people of the hungry world.

In addition we find such wasteful practices as the recent slaughtering and burial of 636 calves by Wisconsin farmers who are protesting low farm prices. Fortunately, good sense prevailed in the case. An additional 1,000 calves were shipped to Honduras to feed the victims of Hurricane Fifi.[15] It should be mentioned, parenthetically, that the news of this productive protest appeared on page 3 and not on page 1 where news of the original calf slaughtering made headlines.

Even in the U.S. where people fare better than in most other countries, many people are suffering from malnutrition. As Louis Berg[16] wrote in the *Saturday Review/World*, when it comes to the matter of eating, it is precisely the poor man's table which is hardest hit:

> The sharpest price raises show up at counters displaying the sorriest meats, the meanest fare, the bone and gristle of the lamb and steer, the wilted vegetable and the spotted and shriveled potato.

Berg points out that soup bones, once given away, sell for $.49/lb. where he shops; salt pork—all fat, no protein—has increased in price from $.69 to $1.19/lb; pig tails—all skin, bone and gristle—never before displayed at meat counters, now sell for $.69/lb.; and newspapers and T.V. reported this week that the price of milk has just gone up another 16 cents a gallon.

Political Ideology and Hunger

I see an urgent need for the U.S. to examine its policies regarding access to American food resources. There are indications that our government is using food as a political weapon. For example, I recently read that we have made a wheat deal with Egypt, a coun-

try that happens to have the vast oil resources which the U.S. needs. I ask—what about those countries with millions of starving men, women and children and no minerals or raw materials which they can easily barter for food? Are we to let these millions starve? The U.S. government must let need weigh more than greed when it considers the distribution of resources. We must think of those people, at home and abroad, who need our support.

The following paragraph illustrates the relative affluence of the United States compared with that of other nations:[17]

> If the world were a global village of 100 people, 70 of them would be unable to read, and only one would have a college education. Over 50 would be suffering from malnutrition, and over 30 would live in what we call substandard housing. If the world were a global village of 100 residents, 6 of them would be Americans. These 6 would have half of the village's entire income, and the other 94 would exist on the other half. How would the wealthy 6 live "in peace" with their neighbors? Surely they would be driven to arm themselves against the other 94 . . . perhaps even spend, as we do, more per person on military defense than the total per person income of the others.

Urban Mortality

The stressful conditions under which poor and minority peoples live take their toll. In 1967 infant mortality on eastside Detroit was more than 40 per 1000 live births. In the Cristo Rey community in Lansing the infant mortality rate reached 65 per 1000 live births. For Lansing residents who live in what the Department of Public Health calls "poor housing," the infant mortality rate is 147 per 1000 live births. This figure is six and one-half times higher than the national average and fifty percent higher than the rate in Chile, the country with the highest infant mortality rate in Latin America.[18]

The situation for adults is also bleak. According to Kurt Gorwitz, Assistant Director for Research and Analysis, Office of Health and Medical Affairs in Lansing, age adjusted mortality rates for non-white male and female residents of the U.S. (I add, parenthetically, most of whom live in our cities) are forty percent higher than comparable figures for their white counterparts. Life expectancy, as a result, is about five years lower.[19]

In a study to determine the causes of high mortality rates among black males in Michigan, Gorwitz uncovered some startling facts:

One of every *eight* black males in Michigan will ultimately die

from an accident or homicide, given current rates.[20]

The number of homicides among black men in Michigan, ages 15-44, has virtually *doubled* in the last five years.[21]

In presenting these statistics to the American Statistical Association in August, Gorwitz concluded:

> It may be logically argued that the rising and excessive homicide rate among black males is directly related to cultural, economic and social issues which must ultimately be reconciled and resolved. However, such efforts would require a long-range, on-going commitment . . .[22]

Help or Self-Destruction

It is such an on-going commitment that I urge educators to make. The rising homicide rate among black males indicates that our community is heading on a path of self-destruction prompted by the miserable economic and social conditions with which many have been forced to live.

These deplorable conditions have existed for years. Discrimination against poor and minority citizens is a fact. We know it is. The question is: how do we deal with it? Blaming the white community for our problems does not help erase them. We can't make excuses any more.

Fortunately, some people are beginning to act. For instance, the black community is finally beginning to make some progress in the fight against urban crime. In Detroit, a predominantly black group, the Concerned Citizens Council, has just launched a "Citizens' Crusade against Crime." In Philadelphia, a similar group has formed. Coleman Young, mayor of Detroit, has established mini-police stations in a number of urban neighborhoods to try to give these minority communities better police protection and reduce the number of crimes in those target areas. Right now, a research team from Michigan State University's College of Urban Development is evaluating those mini-police stations to determine their good and bad points so that new stations and the existing ones can do the best possible job.

Such programs and actions are a good start, but the minority urban community is greatly in need of help from the leadership present here today. We are in positions to act as advocates and spokesmen for those who are less fortunate than us. We, as educators and as citizens, must begin a campaign to call attention to the injustice and misery in urban society which adversely affect

the quality of urban education. We can no longer distinguish between our educational and political roles.

Recommendations

One of the first tasks facing educators is that of keeping informed about political developments which may affect conditions in schools and communities. For example, the Equal Opportunity and Fair Employment Act of 1976 is being developed currently by the Subcommittee on Equal Opportunities of the House Committee on Education and Labor. If passed, it will establish nationwide machinery for guaranteeing to all adult Americans willing and able to work, the availability of equal opportunity for useful and rewarding employment.[23] A second law, the Housing and Community Development Act, provides financial assistance to communities which "face critical social, economic and environmental problems."[24] The critical problems may be due to population growth in urban areas and concentration of lower-income persons in central cities. By supporting the implementation of such federal programs, educators can help expedite the improvement of city living conditions.

Teachers should also learn which agencies and officials handle complaints about racial discrimination, breaches of renters' rights and other civil rights violations. They should keep on the lookout for such violations, report them immediately, then continue checking to make sure the problems are being resolved.

In addition to keeping informed themselves, teachers and school administrators should make an effort to keep parents advised of what is going on in the school and community. Parents, when aware of issues which affect the children's education, can become activists and advocates for change.

Only by making social change a high priority, can educators hope to alleviate the problems plaguing city schools. Urban problems and educational problems are in a league together. Only by overcoming the first, may we adequately deal with the latter.

Notes

1. Statistics from Mayor's Office of Manpower, Detroit, Michigan, Fall 1974.

2. William K. Stevens, "Detroit Utility is Ordered to Pay $4-Million to Black Workers," *New York Times*, October 3, 1973, p. 18-C.

3. Ibid.

4. Paul M. Branzburg, "Bell Lags on Minority Hiring Goals," *Detroit Free Press*, Oct. 21, 1974, p. 3-A.

5. Robert P. Hey, "U.S. Still Hunting Ways to House Its Poor," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 12, 1974, p. 7-F.

6. "Is the Government Putting Up 'Instant Slums'?" *U.S. News and World Report*, September 11, 1972, p. 66.

7. Ibid.

8. "Probation Popular in HUD Scandal," *Lansing (MI) State Journal*, May 13, 1974, p. 4-A.

9. Dave Adler, "High Costs, Weather Cause Starvation Around Globe," *Michigan State (University) News*, May 2, 1974.

10. "Ethiopians Starving," *Lansing State Journal*, Oct. 20, 1974, p. 3-A.

11. Richard L. Strout, "One of the Greatest Turning Points in Human History," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 19, 1974, p. 1.

12. Harry B. Ellis, "Grain Bank Called Hunger Answer; U.S. Farmers Reluctant, But Moral Pressures Build," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 5, 1974, p. 1.

13. David T. Salisbury, "Warning: Earth's Climate is Changing Faster than Experts Expect; Major Crop Failures Seen," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 27, 1974, p. 12.

14. Adler, op. cit.

15. "Slain Calves to go to Fifi Victims," *Lansing State Journal*, Oct. 20, 1974, p. 3-A.

16. Louis Berg, "Putting the Bite on the Poor," *Saturday Review/World*, July 27, 1974.

17. *IFCO (Interreligious Foundation for Community Development) News*, July-August 1974, Vol. V, Issue IV, p. 3.

18. Robert L. Green, "The University and Society," presentation to new university faculty, Michigan State University, East Lansing, September 15, 1970. Data compiled by John Schweitzer, College of Urban Development, from the following sources: U.N. Statistical Yearbook, 1969; U.N. Demographic Yearbook, 1968; U.N. Compendium of Social Statistics, 1967; Detroit Department of Health, 1968 Data Book; Model Cities Application, Lansing, Michigan, 1968; Michigan Center for Health Statistics.

19. Kurt Gorwitz, "On the Decrease in Male Life Expectancy," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Statistical Association, St. Louis, Missouri, August 26, 1974, p. 1.

20. Ibid., p. 4.

21. Ibid., p. 5.

22. Ibid., p. 5.

23. Lloyd A Johnson, Staff Director, Subcommittee on Equal Opportunities, Committee on Education and Labor, U.S. House of Representatives, personal correspondence, Nov. 7, 1974.

24. National Center for Policy Review, summary document, School of Law, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., 1974.